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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ADJUSTABLE BALLAST**

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B64C 17/00 (2006.01)
B64C 27/04 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **B64C 17/00** (2013.01); **B64C 27/04** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC B64C 17/00; B64C 17/08
See application file for complete search history.

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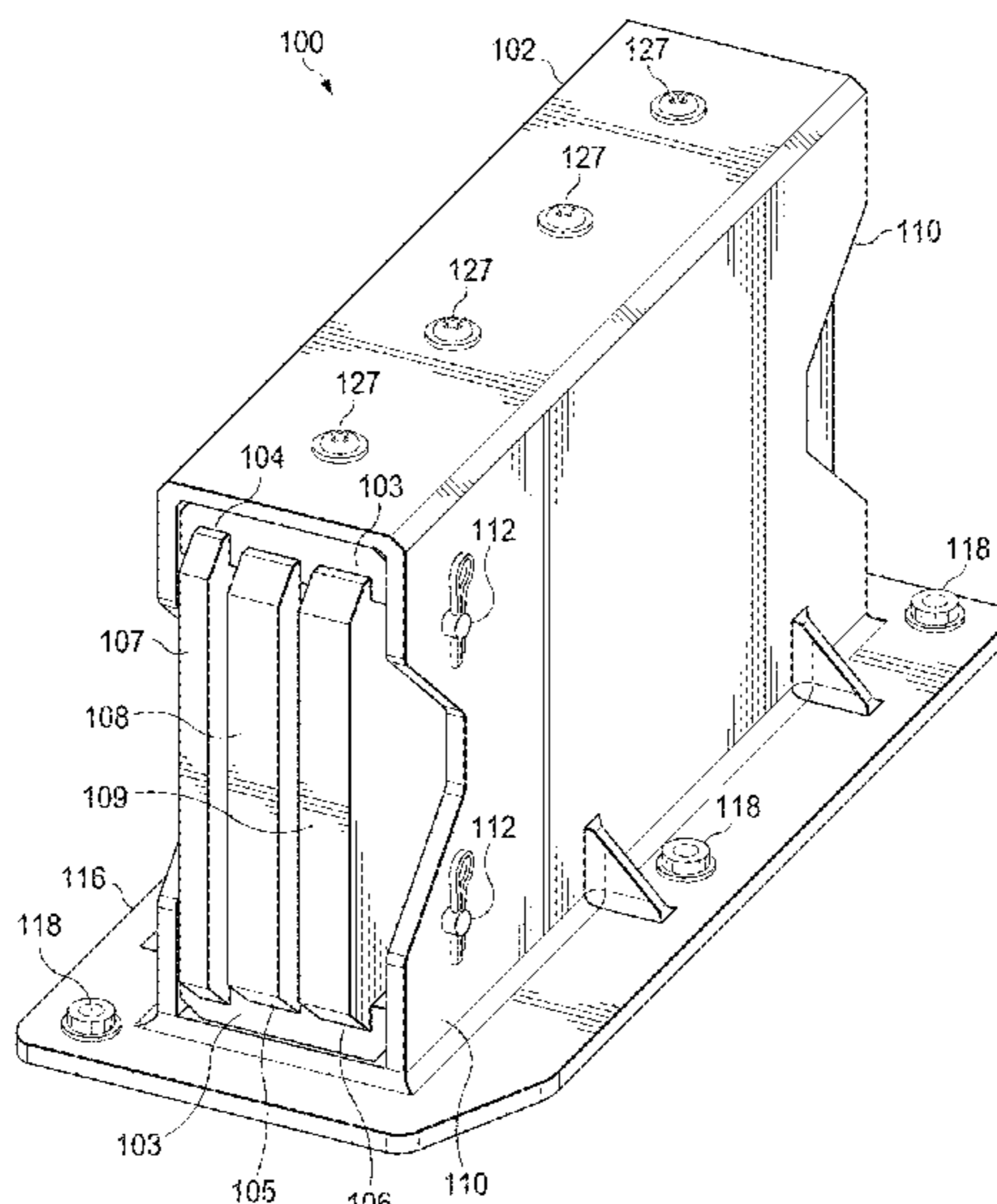
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A movable ballast system for an aircraft includes first and second ballast docks secured to the aircraft. The first ballast dock includes a first housing and a first ballast tray secured within the first housing. The first ballast tray includes a plurality of channels. The second ballast dock is positioned aft of a CG of the aircraft and includes a second housing and a second ballast tray secured within the second housing. The second ballast tray includes a plurality of channels. The movable ballast system includes a plurality of movable ballasts, each movable ballast of the plurality of movable ballasts being configured to fit within at least one channel of each of the plurality of channels of the first and second ballast trays.

20 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



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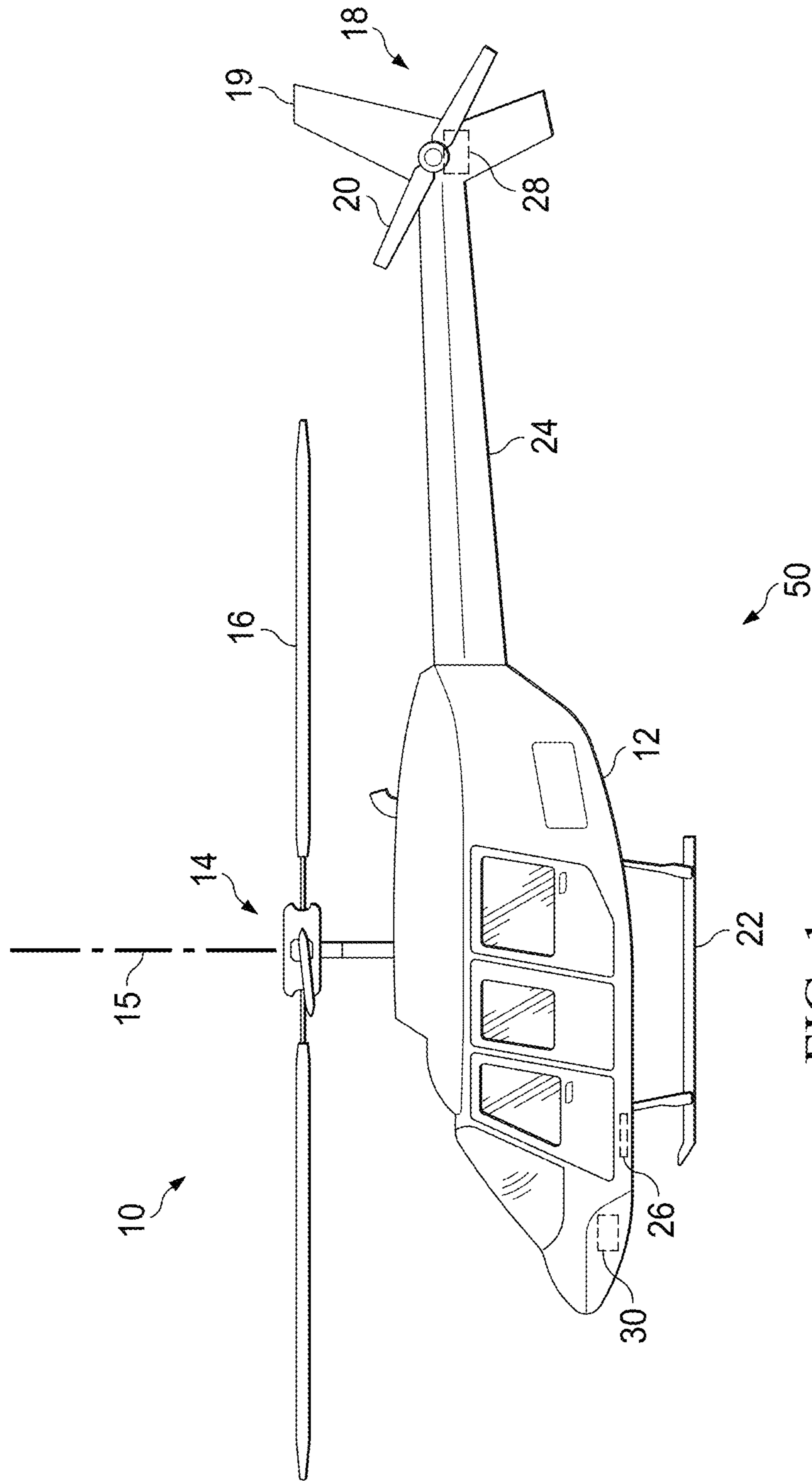


FIG. 1

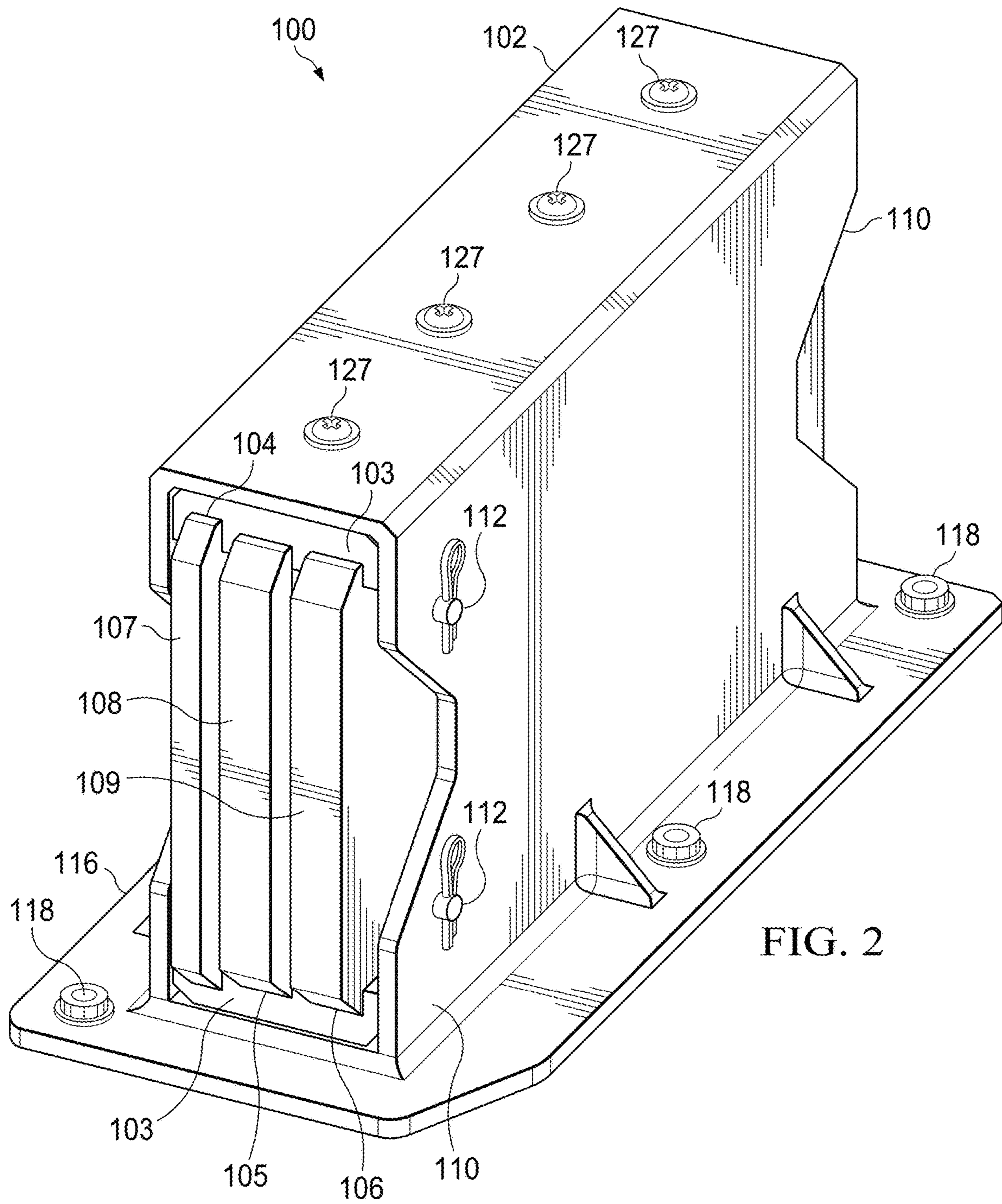


FIG. 2

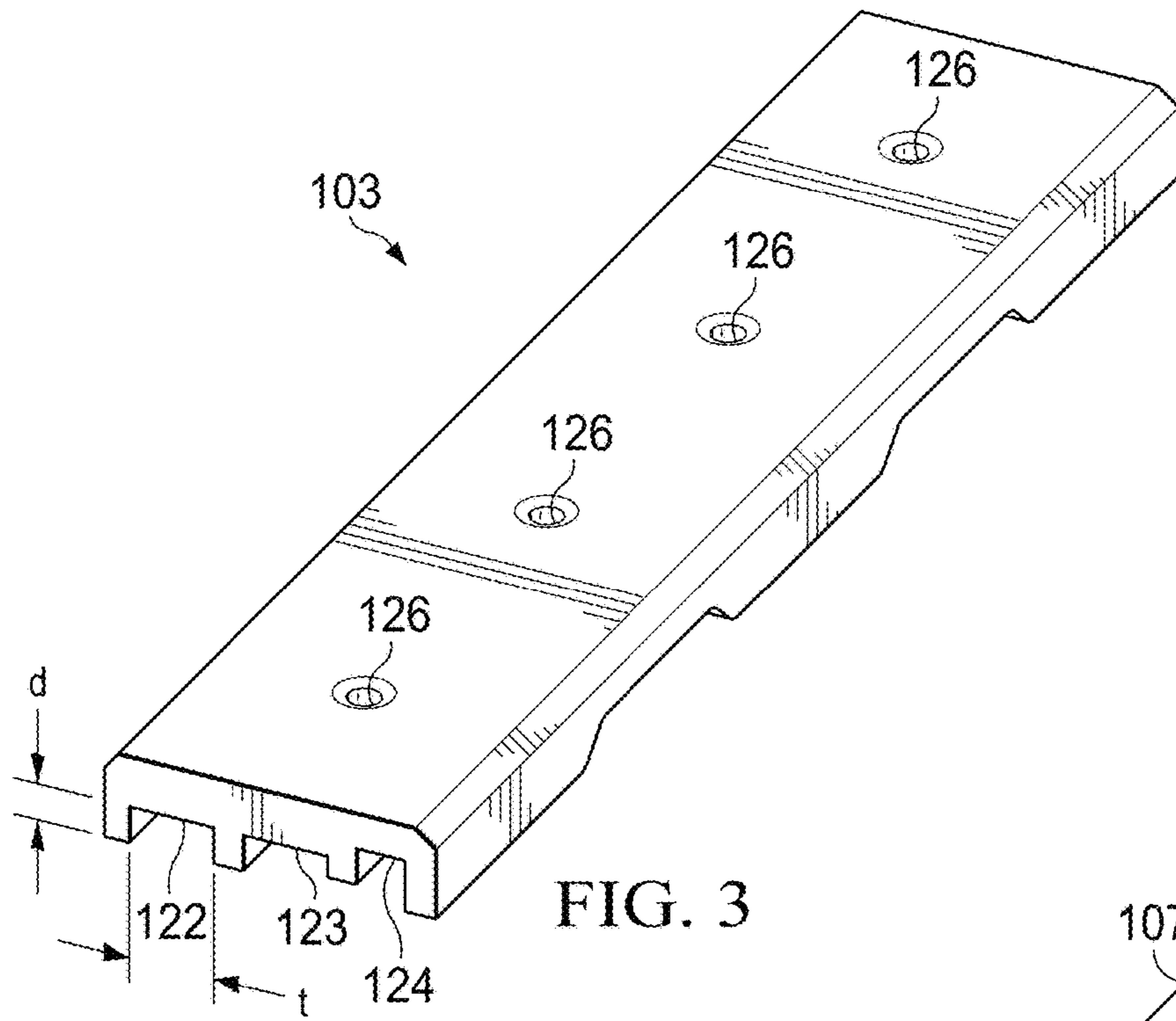


FIG. 3

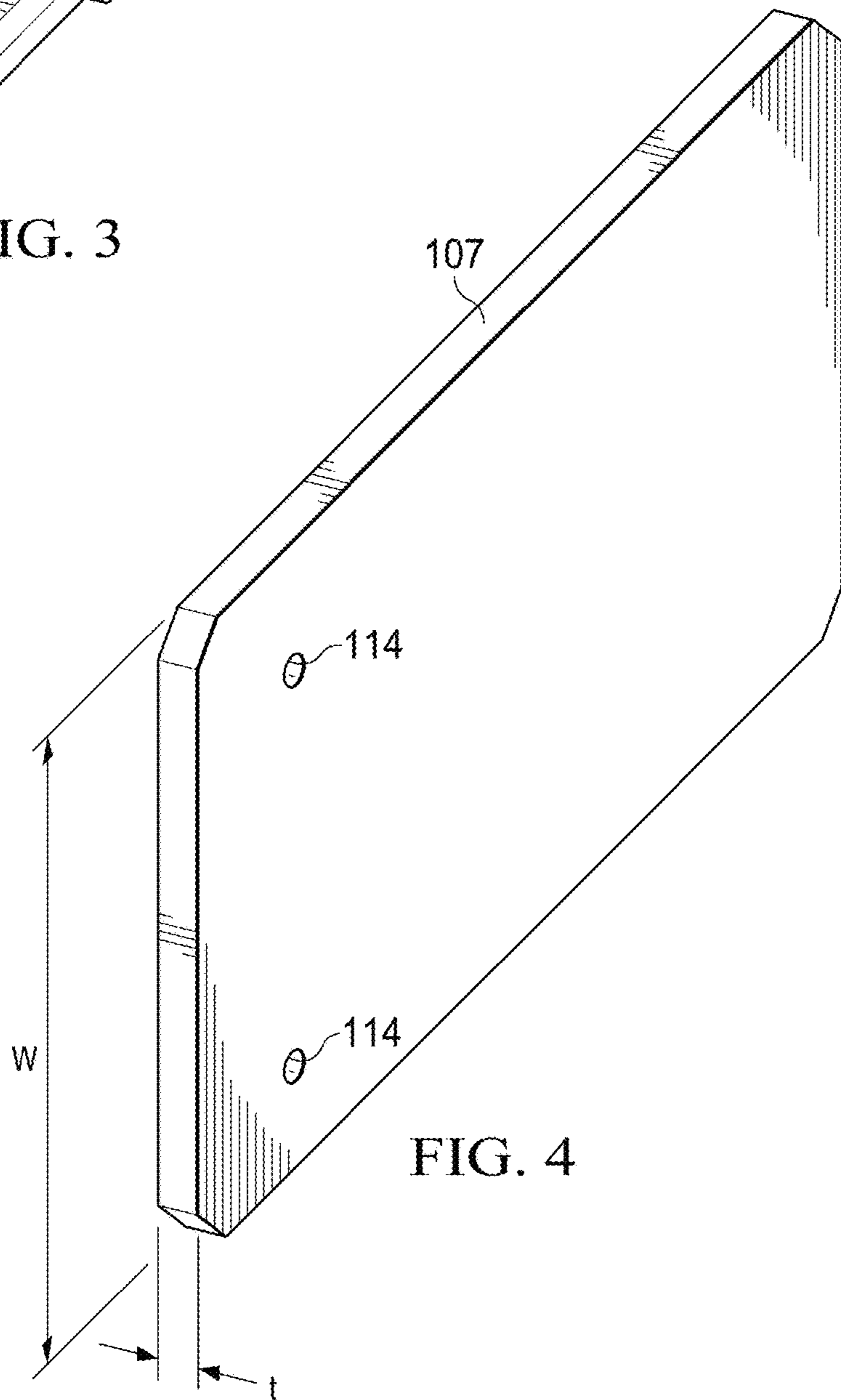


FIG. 4

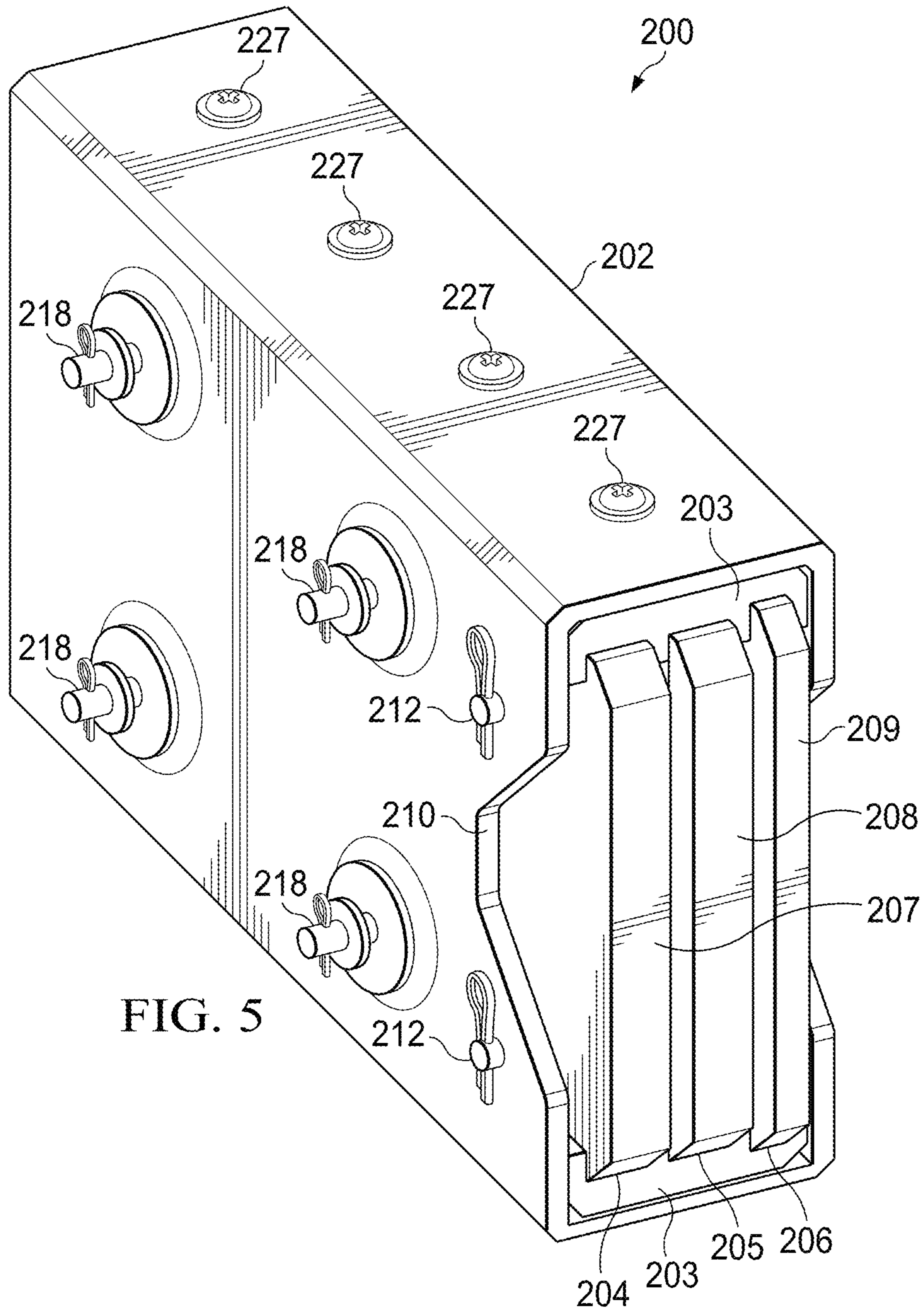


FIG. 5

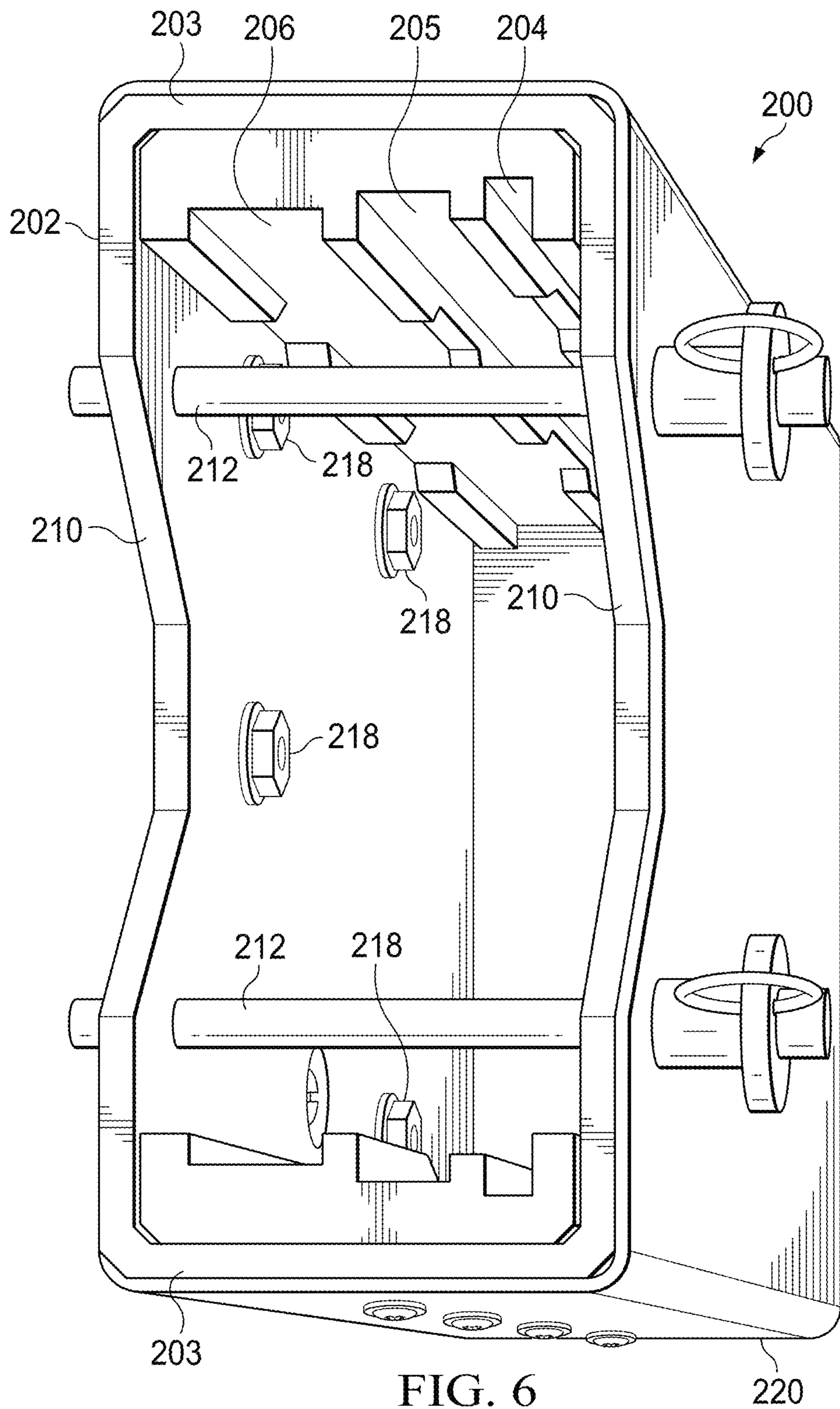


FIG. 6

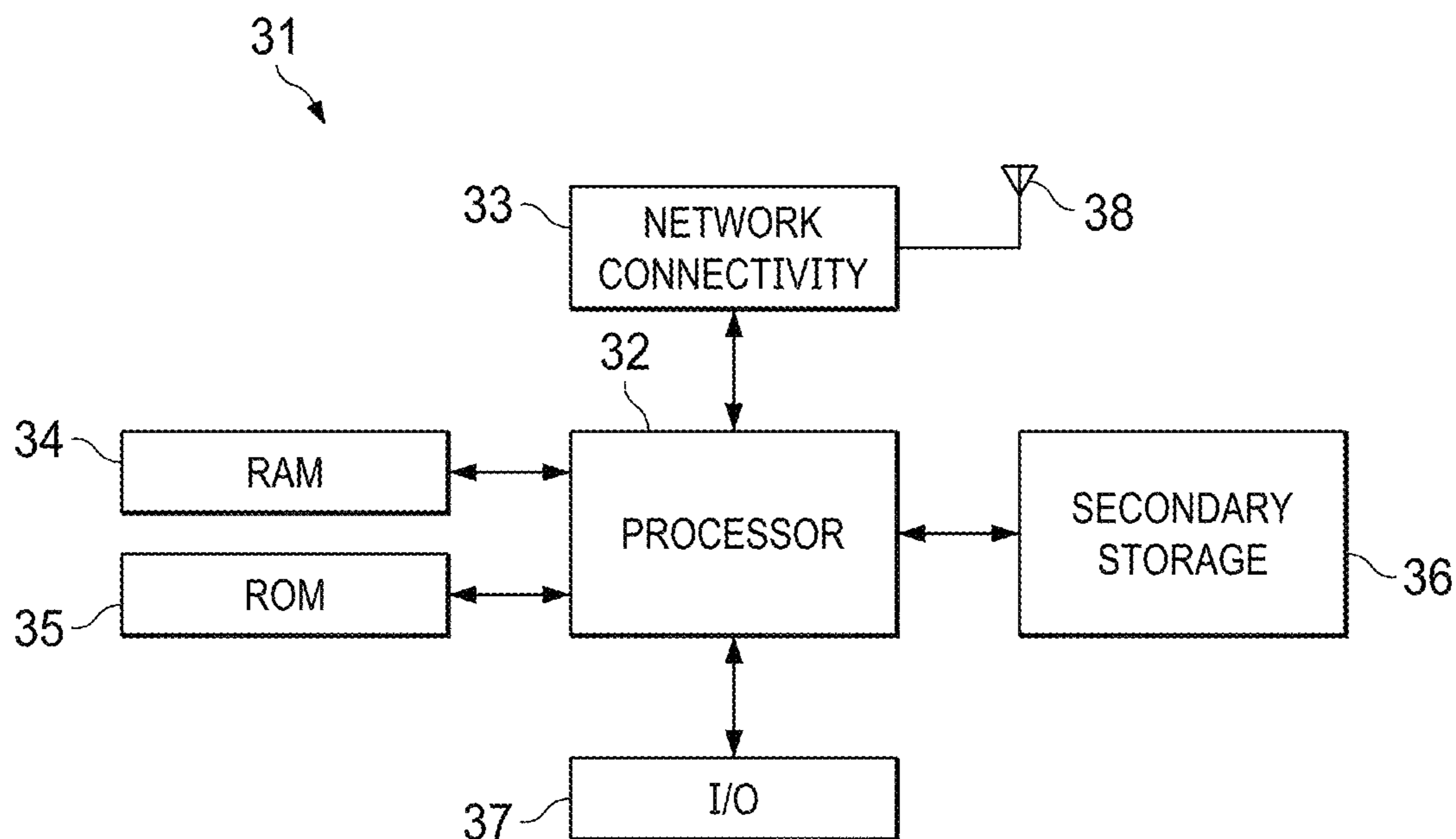


FIG. 7

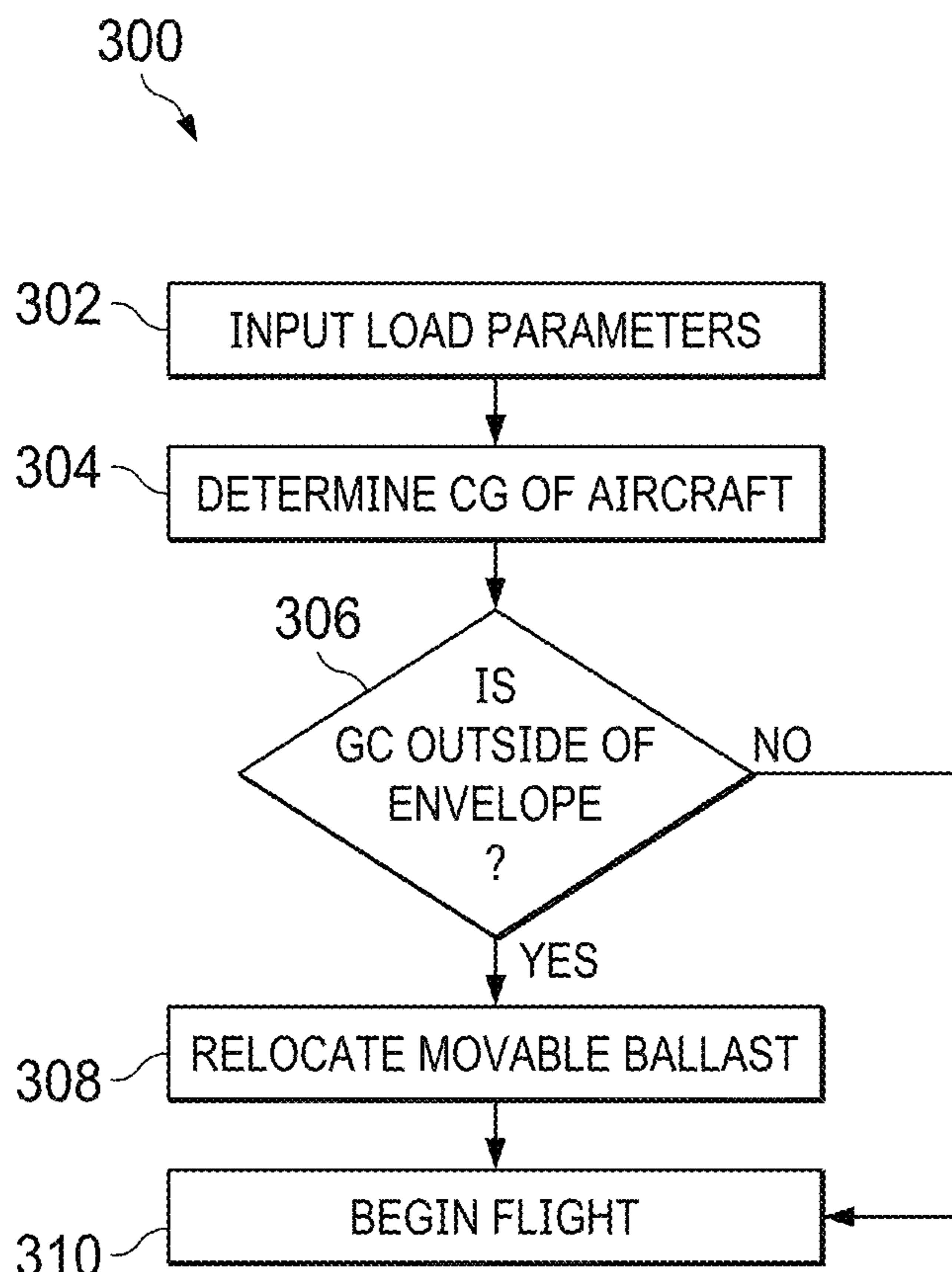


FIG. 8

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ADJUSTABLE BALLAST

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 16/555,515, filed on Aug. 29, 2019, and to issue as U.S. Pat. No. 11,001,373 on May 11, 2021. The contents of U.S. application Ser. No. 16/555,515 are incorporated by reference in their entirety herein for all purposes.

BACKGROUND

This section provides background information to facilitate a better understanding of the various aspects of the disclosure. It should be understood that the statements in this section of this document are to be read in this light, and not as admissions of prior art.

Aircraft often require the use of ballast to ensure that the center of gravity (CG) of the aircraft is within a CG envelope for that particular aircraft. The CG envelope is a bounded area or volume within which the CG of the aircraft should be positioned in order to maintain desirable flight characteristics. When loading up the aircraft with passengers, cargo, and the like, the CG of the aircraft changes. In some situations, the CG can change so much that the CG moves outside of the aircraft's CG envelope and the aircraft's flight characteristics are negatively affected. In order to maintain desirable flight characteristics, it is important that the CG stay within the desired CG envelope.

Modern aircraft often have flight control computers that monitor various aspects of the aircraft. Some flight control computers have the ability to calculate the CG based upon information input by a pilot. This information can include aircraft configuration information (e.g., number and location of seats installed), passenger information (e.g., passenger weight and location), cargo information (e.g., weight and location), and the like. Upon inputting this data, the flight control computer determines the approximate CG of the aircraft. If necessary, the pilot can adjust the CG by making adjustments to one or more of the passenger position, cargo position, and the like to adjust the center of gravity. However, in some instances such adjustments are not desirable or practical.

Some aircrafts include fixed ballasts to manipulate the CG of the aircraft. Fixed ballasts can technically be removed and/or added, but doing so requires a certified mechanic due to the amount and type of work required. Furthermore, removal/addition of fixed ballasts is often impractical or impossible. As a workaround, some pilots add temporary ballast to the aircraft, such as sandbags or water jugs, to alter the CG. Adding temporary ballast to the aircraft can be problematic. For example, the aircraft may fly from a first location to a second location to drop off cargo or passengers. For the return flight from the second location to the first location, the CG of the aircraft may have changed significantly. To address the CG change, the pilot needs to add ballast to the aircraft. The problem with using temporary ballast is that the pilot may not have access to temporary ballast at the second location. The inverse is also true. For example, if the aircraft flies from the first location to the second location to pick up cargo or passengers, the aircraft may require temporary ballast on the way to pick up the cargo or passengers. When returning from the second location to the first location, the temporary ballast may no longer be needed. The pilot must then leave the ballast behind or

use up some of the aircraft's cargo capacity (both weight and volume) with the temporary ballast.

SUMMARY

An example of a movable ballast system for an aircraft includes first and second ballast docks secured to the aircraft. The first ballast dock includes a first housing and a first ballast tray secured within the first housing. The first ballast tray includes a plurality of channels. The second ballast dock is positioned aft of a CG of the aircraft and includes a second housing and a second ballast tray secured within the second housing. The second ballast tray includes a plurality of channels. The movable ballast system includes a plurality of movable ballasts, each movable ballast of the plurality of movable ballasts being configured to fit within at least one channel of each of the plurality of channels of the first and second ballast trays.

An example of a ballast dock includes a housing, a first ballast tray secured within the housing and comprising a plurality of channels, and a plurality of movable ballasts, each movable ballast of the plurality of movable ballasts comprising a side configured to fit within at least one channel of the plurality of channels.

This summary is provided to introduce a selection of concepts that are further described below in the detailed description. This summary is not intended to identify key or essential features of the claimed subject matter, nor is it intended to be used as an aid in limiting the scope of claimed subject matter.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The disclosure is best understood from the following detailed description when read with the accompanying figures. It is emphasized that, in accordance with standard practice in the industry, various features are not drawn to scale. In fact, the dimensions of various features may be arbitrarily increased or reduced for clarity of discussion.

FIG. 1 illustrates a rotorcraft in accordance with aspects of the disclosure;

FIG. 2 illustrates a ballast dock in accordance with aspects of the disclosure;

FIG. 3 illustrates a ballast tray in accordance with aspects of the disclosure;

FIG. 4 illustrates a ballast in accordance with aspects of the disclosure;

FIGS. 5 and 6 illustrate a ballast dock in accordance with aspects of the disclosure;

FIG. 7 is a schematic diagram of a general-purpose processor (e.g. electronic controller or computer) system suitable for implementing aspects of the disclosure; and

FIG. 8 is an illustrative method for moving a center of gravity of an aircraft.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

It is to be understood that the following disclosure provides many different embodiments, or examples, for implementing different features of various embodiments. Specific examples of components and arrangements are described below to simplify the disclosure. These are, of course, merely examples and are not intended to be limiting. In addition, the disclosure may repeat reference numerals and/or letters in the various examples. This repetition is for the

purpose of simplicity and clarity and does not in itself dictate a relationship between the various embodiments and/or configurations discussed.

In the specification, reference may be made to the spatial relationships between various components and to the spatial orientation of various aspects of components as the devices are depicted in the attached drawings. However, as will be recognized by those skilled in the art after a complete reading of the present disclosure, the devices, members, apparatuses, etc. described herein may be positioned in any desired orientation. Thus, the use of terms such as “above,” “below,” “upper,” “lower,” or other like terms to describe a spatial relationship between various components or to describe the spatial orientation of aspects of such components should be understood to describe a relative relationship between the components or a spatial orientation of aspects of such components, respectively, as the device described herein may be oriented in any desired direction.

FIG. 1 illustrates an example of a rotorcraft 10. Rotorcraft 10 includes a fuselage 12, a main rotor system 14 with rotor blades 16, and a tail rotor system 18 with tail rotor blades 20. An engine within fuselage 12 supplies main rotor system 14 and tail rotor system 18 with torque to rotate rotor blades 16 and tail rotor blades 20. As illustrated in FIG. 1, rotorcraft 10 includes four rotor blades 16. In other aspects, rotorcraft 10 could include as few as two or three rotor blades 16 or more than four rotor blades 16 (e.g., five, six, etc.). Landing gear 22 extend from fuselage 12 and support rotorcraft 10 when rotorcraft 10 is landing or when rotorcraft 10 is at rest on the ground. Rotorcraft 10 includes a flight control computer 30 configured monitor and control aspects of rotorcraft 10. Rotorcraft 10 is not meant to be limiting. Aspects of the disclosure apply to other rotorcraft as well.

Rotorcraft 10 includes a movable ballast system 50 that includes a fore ballast dock 26 and an aft ballast dock 28. The terms fore and aft are used to indicated that fore ballast dock 26 is located forward of aft ballast dock 28 and aft ballast dock 28 is located rearward of fore ballast dock 26. Movable ballast system 50 allows the CG of rotorcraft 10 to be adjusted by selectively placing ballasts into fore ballast dock 26 and aft ballast dock 28. For example, the CG of rotorcraft 10 can be moved forward by placing ballasts into fore ballast dock 26 and the CG rotorcraft 10 can be moved rearward by placing ballasts into aft ballast dock 28.

Fore ballast dock 26 is typically located fore of an axis 15 of the mast of main rotor system 14. In some aspects fore ballast dock 26 is located fore of the CG of rotorcraft 10. In some aspects, fore ballast dock 26 may be located under a pilot or co-pilot seat. Placing fore ballast dock 26 under the pilot or co-pilot seats provides easy access to fore ballast dock 26. In other aspects, fore ballast dock 26 may be located in another location within fuselage 12 (e.g., in or near a foot well of the pilot or co-pilot, secured to a seatback of the pilot or co-pilot, on the ceiling, and the like). In other aspects, fore ballast dock 26 may be located on an underside of fuselage 12.

Aft ballast dock 28 is typically located aft of axis 15 of the mast of main rotor system 14. In a typical aspect, aft ballast dock 28 is located aft of the CG of rotorcraft 10. In some aspects, aft ballast dock 28 is located aft of the CG of rotorcraft 10 (e.g., proximal to tail rotor system 18) and fore ballast dock 26 is located proximal to the CG of the aircraft (e.g., fore ballast dock 28 may be located close to but fore or aft of the CG of the aircraft). In various aspects, aft ballast dock 28 is secured to tail fin 19 or tail boom 24 of rotorcraft 10. As illustrated in FIG. 1, aft ballast dock 28 is located proximal to tail rotor system 18. In other aspects, aft ballast

dock 28 may be located at a position anywhere along tail boom 24 or in or on fuselage 12 that is rearward of axis 15. Positioning aft ballast dock 28 farther rearward provides more leverage for the ballast in aft ballast dock 28, which increases the ballast effect of aft ballast dock 28.

Movable ballast system 50 is shown illustrated with rotorcraft 10. Those of skill in the art will recognize that movable ballast system 50 could be implemented on other aircraft including tiltrotors and airplanes. For example, when used with an airplane, fore ballast dock 26 may be located fore of a CG of the aircraft and aft ballast dock 28 may be located aft of the CG of the aircraft (e.g., proximal to the tail of the aircraft)

FIG. 2 is a perspective view illustrating a ballast dock 100 according to aspects of the disclosure. Ballast dock 100 may be used as either or both of fore ballast dock 26 and aft ballast dock 28 of FIG. 1. Ballast dock 100 includes a housing 102 that is configured to receive removable ballast. In some aspects, a shroud (e.g., similar to shroud 220 of FIG. 6) optionally covers housing 102 to improve aesthetics of ballast dock 100. In some aspects, the shroud may be included on fore ballast dock 26 and excluded on aft ballast dock 28. Housing 102 includes cut outs 110 that expose a portion of movable ballasts 107-109 when movable ballasts 107-109 are inserted in ballast dock 100. Cut outs 110 make it easier for a user (e.g., a pilot) to see which, if any, movable ballasts 107-109 are inserted into ballast dock 100 and to grip movable ballasts 107-109 for removal from housing 102.

Housing 102 includes ballast trays 103 secured within a cavity of housing 102 that form bays 104-106. Ballast trays 103 are secured to housing 102 via fasteners 127. Bays 104-106 are configured to receive movable ballasts 107-109, respectively. Each movable ballast of movable ballasts 107-109 is a plate that slides into and out of bays 104-106, respectively. Each of movable ballasts 108 and 109 are similar to movable ballast 107 but may have slightly different dimensions. Movable ballasts 107-109 can be made of various materials. In various aspects, movable ballasts 107-109 are made from dense materials (e.g., tungsten, steel, and the like) to provide more weight per volume so that a size of movable ballast system 50 can be minimized. In some aspects, each of bays 104-106 and movable ballasts 107-109, respectively, are complementarily shaped such that movable ballast 107 only fits in bay 104, movable ballast 108 only fits in bay 105, and movable ballast 109 only fits in bay 106. For example, each movable ballast 107-109 has a unique thickness t and width w that is complemented by each bay 104-106 to prevent a user from placing a ballast in the incorrect bay. Each channel of ballast tray 103 includes complementary depth d and thickness t to receive movable ballasts 107-109. Dimensioning each movable ballast with unique dimensions allows a user to visually recognize which movable ballasts—and thus which weights—are inserted into ballast dock 100. In other aspects, each bay 104-106 and movable ballast 107-109 may include the same dimensions, allowing any of movable ballasts 107-109 to be placed into any of bays 104-106. Although FIG. 2 illustrates three bays and three ballasts, it will be appreciated that fewer than three bays and three ballasts or more than three bays and three ballasts may be included.

In the aspect illustrated in FIG. 2, movable ballast 107 has a first weight and movable ballasts 108 and 109 have a second weight, with the first weight being less than the second weight. For example, the first weight may be five pounds and the second weight may be ten pounds (i.e., a combined weight of movable ballasts 107-109 would be

twenty five pounds). In other aspects, each movable ballast **107-109** may have a different weight. In other aspects, each of the first, second, and third weights may be the same.

FIG. **3** illustrates ballast tray **103** according to aspects of the disclosure. As illustrated in FIG. **2**, ballast dock **100** includes two ballast trays **103**. Ballast trays **103** are mirrors of each other. Only one ballast tray **103** will be discussed with the understanding that the discussion applies to both ballast trays. Ballast tray **103** includes channels **122-124** that are configured to receive a side of movable ballasts **107-109**. For example, each channel **122-124** is dimensioned to accommodate the thickness and width of movable ballasts **107-109**. Opposing channels **122-124** of the two ballast trays **103** form bays **104-106**. Ballast tray **103** includes one or more bores **126** that receive fasteners **127** (e.g., screws, bolts, pins, and the like) to secure ballast tray **103** to housing **102**.

In some aspects, ballast tray **103** is made from or coated with a non-metallic material to reduce the likelihood of movable ballasts **107-109** rattling within housing **102**. For example, ballast tray **103** may be made from rubbers, plastics, polymers and the like. Coatings can be applied to a surface of ballast tray **103**. Coating materials include rubbers, plastics, polymers, fabrics, textiles, and the like. In some aspects, movable ballasts **107-109** may be coated with a material to reduce the likelihood of movable ballasts **107-109** rattling within housing **102**. Coating materials include rubbers, plastics, polymers, fabrics, textiles, and the like.

In some aspects, ballast dock **100** includes a single ballast tray **103**. In aspects with only a single ballast tray **103**, channels **122-124** are dimensioned so that opposite edges of movable ballasts **107-109** abut an opposite side of housing **102** so that movable ballasts **107-109** are retained securely within housing **102** to prevent movable ballasts from rattling inside housing **102**.

Movable ballasts **107-109** are further secured within housing **102** by pins **112** that pass through coaxially aligned bores formed through housing **102** and movable ballasts **107-109**. FIG. **4** illustrates bores **114** formed through movable ballasts **107**. Similar bores are formed through each of movable ballasts **108** and **109**. Pins **112** lock in place any of movable ballasts **107-109** that are placed into housing **102**. In some aspects, each pin **112** passes through a top of housing **102** and a bottom of housing **102**. In various aspects, ballast dock **100** may include only one pin **112** or more than two pins **112**.

Ballast dock **100** includes a mounting plate **116** that facilitates mounting ballast dock **100** to rotorcraft **10**. As illustrated in FIG. **2**, mounting plate **116** includes bores to accommodate fasteners **118** that are used to secure ballast dock **100** to, for example, a wall or floor within fuselage **12** or another part of the airframe of rotorcraft **10**. Fasteners **118** may be screws, bolts, pins, and the like. In some aspects, ballast dock **100** is secured to a portion of the cabin floor in proximity to pilot's seat to allow the pilot to visibly inspect ballast dock **100** from the pilot's seat. Mounting plate **116** positioned on along a short side of housing **102** so that ballast dock **100** takes up less mounting surface area. In some aspects, mounting plate **116** is integrally formed with housing **102**. In some aspects, mounting plate **116** is a separate piece that attaches to housing **102**.

FIG. **5** illustrates a ballast dock **200** according to aspects of the disclosure. Ballast dock **200** is similar to ballast dock **100** discussed above and is intended to be used with movable ballasts **107-109** such that movable ballasts **107-109** may be used with either of ballast docks **100** and **200**.

Similar part numbers are used in FIG. **5** for parts that are similar to those described in FIG. **2**. Ballast dock **200** may similarly also be used as either or both of fore/aft ballast dock **26**, **28**. Ballast dock **200** includes a housing **202** and a shroud **220**. Shroud **220** covers housing **202** for aesthetic purposes. Housing **202** includes ballast trays **203** that form bays **204-206**. Ballast trays **203** are secured to housing **202** via fasteners **227**. Bays **204-206** are configured to receive movable ballasts **107-109**. Cut outs **210** provide easier access to movable ballasts **107-109**. In the aspect of FIG. **5**, each of movable ballasts **107-109** has a different weight, as indicated by their different thicknesses t and widths w . In other aspects, movable ballasts **107-109** could have the same weights and dimensions. In other aspects, movable ballast **107** could have a first weight and each of movable ballasts **108**, **109** could have a second weight.

In contrast to ballast dock **100**, ballast dock **200** does not include mounting plate **116**. Instead, housing **202** attaches to rotorcraft **10** via fasteners **218** that pass through a bottom side of housing **202**. Relative to ballast dock **100**, ballast dock **200** offers a different mounting configuration to allow for different mounting scenarios. For example, it may be preferable to use ballast dock **100** as fore ballast dock **26** and to use ballast dock **200** as aft ballast dock **28**. Other aspects may use either ballast dock **100**, **200** as fore ballast dock **26** and/or either ballast dock **100**, **200** as aft ballast dock **28**.

FIG. **6** illustrates an embodiment of ballast dock **200** with movable ballasts **107-109** removed. With movable ballasts **107-109** removed, pins **212** can be seen extending through coaxially aligned bores of housing **202** and shroud **220**. FIG. **6** illustrates an exemplary aspect in which each pin **212** extends through a bottom of housing **202**. In such an aspect, pins **212** extend through the bottom of housing **202** and into a grommet affixed to fuselage **12**. In a typical aspect, the grommets have a diameter that is larger than a diameter of pins **212** so that pins **212** do not contact the grommets, which prevents pins **212** from introducing horizontal shear loads to the floor of fuselage **12**.

In an exemplary aspect, fore ballast dock **26** comprises ballast dock **100** and aft ballast dock **28** comprises ballast dock **200**. Those having skill in the art will recognize that either of fore/aft ballast docks **26**, **28** could be either of ballast docks **100**, **200**. To alter the CG of rotorcraft **10**, a user (e.g., a pilot, ground crew, etc.) can move one or more of movable ballasts **107-109** between fore ballast dock **26** and aft ballast dock **28**. For example, in a heavy cabin aspect (e.g., rotorcraft **10** is loaded up with passengers or cargo), the CG of rotorcraft **10** is located relatively forward as a result of the extra weight of the passengers and/or cargo. If the CG shifts too far forward, the flight characteristics of rotorcraft **10** will be altered. For example, a forward CG requires excessive rear cyclic to maintain a hover. To combat a forward CG, the user can insert one or more of movable ballasts **107-109** in aft ballast dock **28** as needed to shift the CG toward the rear of rotorcraft **10**. Due to the long lever arm afforded by tail boom **24**, adding one or more movable ballasts **107-109** to aft ballast dock **28** can have a large effect upon the location of the CG of rotorcraft **10**.

In a light cabin aspect (e.g., rotorcraft **10** is not loaded up with passengers and/or cargo), the CG of rotorcraft **10** is located relatively rearward as a result of the lack of weight from passengers and/or cargo. If the CG shifts too far rearward, the flight characteristics of rotorcraft **10** will be altered. For example, a rearward CG requires excessive forward cyclic to maintain a hover. To combat a rearward CG, the user can insert one or more of movable ballasts **107-109** into fore ballast dock **26** as needed to shift the CG

toward the front of rotorcraft **10**. Due to the long lever arm afforded by tail boom **24**, removing one or more movable ballasts **107-109** from aft ballast dock **28** can have a large effect upon the location of the CG of rotorcraft **10**.

In either a heavy or light cabin aspect, movable ballast system **50** allows a user to quickly and easily move one or more of movable ballasts **107-109** between fore/aft ballast docks **26, 28** to adjust the CG of rotorcraft **10**. In contrast to movable ballast system **50**, conventional rotorcraft have no ballast system or have a fixed ballast system. A fixed ballast system adds ballast to the aircraft by bolting the ballast to the airframe of the aircraft. For example, ballast may be bolted into a tail section of the aircraft. In a heavy cabin scenario, the pilot has no ability to add temporary ballast to the tail section and instead must try to shift cargo etc. to the rear of the cabin and hope that the rearrangement of the cargo is sufficient to address the rearward CG. In a light cabin scenario, the pilot must add temporary ballast (e.g., water jugs or sandbags) to the cabin to counteract the rearward CG problem. Removal of ballast bolted to the tail section is impractical as it requires a certified mechanic to disassemble components of the aircraft to remove the bolted-in ballast.

Compared to conventional ballast setups, movable ballast system **50** is more versatile as it gives the user the ability to shift the CG forward or rearward as needed without the need of such items as sandbags and water jugs for temporary ballast. Relying on temporary ballast can be problematic as a user may not always have convenient access to temporary ballast when needed. For example, if an aircraft flies to a remote destination while loaded up with passengers and/or cargo, the aircraft may be in a heavy cabin scenario with a forward CG where rear ballast is needed. Once the passengers and/or cargo are no longer on board, the aircraft may transition from a heavy cabin to a light cabin with rearward CG. Movable ballast system **50** allows the user to easily place one or more movable ballasts **107-109** into aft ballast dock **28** for the first leg of the trip to counteract the forward CG and to easily place one or more movable ballasts **107-109** into fore ballast dock **26** to counteract the rearward CG for the second leg of the flight. Without movable ballast system **50**, it may be difficult for a user to add the needed temporary ballast once the aircraft arrives at the remote location as materials needed for the temporary ballast may not be readily available.

In an opposite scenario, where the aircraft flies to a remote location to pick up passengers and/or cargo, the aircraft may start the journey in a light cabin scenario with a rearward CG. Without movable ballast system **50**, the user must place temporary ballast in the cabin to counteract the rearward CG. Once the aircraft arrives at the remote location to pick up the passengers and/or cargo, the temporary ballast is no longer necessary as the aircraft will transition to a heavy cabin scenario. The user must then either leave the temporary ballast behind or take up some of the space and carrying capacity of the aircraft with the temporary ballast, neither of which is desirable.

In some aspects, flight control computer **30** calculates a CG of rotorcraft **10** to aid a user in determining placement of movable ballasts **107-109** into fore/aft ballast docks **26, 28**. FIG. 7 is a schematic diagram of a general-purpose processor (e.g. electronic controller or computer) system **31** suitable for implementing the aspects of this disclosure is shown. System **31** includes processing component and/or processor **32** suitable for implementing one or more aspects disclosed herein. In some aspects, flight control computer **30** and/or other electronic systems of rotorcraft **10** may include one or more systems **31**. In addition to processor **32** (which

may be referred to as a central processor unit or CPU), system **31** might include network connectivity devices **33**, random access memory (RAM) **34**, read only memory (ROM) **35**, secondary storage **36**, and input/output (I/O) devices **37**. In some cases, some of these components may not be present or may be combined in various combinations with one another or with other components not shown. These components might be located in a single physical entity or in more than one physical entity. Any actions described herein as being taken by the processor **32** might be taken by the processor **32** alone or by the processor **32** in conjunction with one or more components shown or not shown in the system **31**. It will be appreciated that the data described herein can be stored in memory and/or in one or more databases.

Processor **32** executes instructions, codes, computer programs, or scripts that it might access from the network connectivity devices **33**, RAM **34**, ROM **35**, or secondary storage **36** (which might include various disk-based systems such as hard disk, floppy disk, optical disk, or other drive). While only one processor **32** is shown, multiple processors **32** may be present. Thus, while instructions may be discussed as being executed by processor **32**, the instructions may be executed simultaneously, serially, or otherwise by one or multiple processors **32**. The processor **32** may be implemented as one or more CPU chips and/or application specific integrated chips (ASICs).

The network connectivity devices **33** may take the form of modems, modem banks, Ethernet devices, universal serial bus (USB) interface devices, serial interfaces, token ring devices, fiber distributed data interface (FDDI) devices, wireless local area network (WLAN) devices, radio transceiver devices such as code division multiple access (CDMA) devices, global system for mobile communications (GSM) radio transceiver devices, worldwide interoperability for microwave access (WiMAX) devices, and/or other well-known devices for connecting to networks. These network connectivity devices **33** may enable the processor **32** to communicate with the Internet or one or more telecommunications networks or other networks from which the processor **32** might receive information or to which the processor **32** might output information.

The network connectivity devices **33** might also include one or more transceiver components **38** capable of transmitting and/or receiving data wirelessly in the form of electromagnetic waves, such as radio frequency signals or microwave frequency signals. Alternatively, the data may propagate in or on the surface of electrical conductors, in coaxial cables, in waveguides, in optical media such as optical fiber, or in other media. The transceiver component **38** might include separate receiving and transmitting units or a single transceiver. Information transmitted or received by the transceiver component **38** may include data that has been processed by the processor **32** or instructions that are to be executed by processor **32**. Such information may be received from and outputted to a network in the form, for example, of a computer data baseband signal or signal embodied in a carrier wave. The data may be ordered according to different sequences as may be desirable for either processing or generating the data or transmitting or receiving the data. The baseband signal, the signal embedded in the carrier wave, or other types of signals currently used or hereafter developed may be referred to as the transmission medium and may be generated according to several methods well known to one skilled in the art.

RAM **34** might be used to store volatile data and perhaps to store instructions that are executed by the processor **32**.

The ROM 35 is a non-volatile memory device that typically has a smaller memory capacity than the memory capacity of the secondary storage 36. ROM 35 might be used to store instructions and perhaps data that are read during execution of the instructions. Access to both RAM 34 and ROM 35 is typically faster than to secondary storage 36. The secondary storage 36 is typically comprised of one or more disk drives or tape drives and might be used for non-volatile storage of data or as an over-flow data storage device if RAM 34 is not large enough to hold all working data. Secondary storage 36 may be used to store programs or instructions that are loaded into RAM 34 when such programs are selected for execution or information is needed.

The I/O devices 37 may include liquid crystal displays (LCDs), touchscreen displays, keyboards, keypads, switches, dials, mice, track balls, voice recognizers, card readers, paper tape readers, printers, video monitors, transducers, sensors, or other well-known input or output devices such as “glass cockpits.” Also, transceiver component 38 might be considered to be a component of the I/O devices 360 instead of or in addition to being a component of the network connectivity devices 33. Some or all of the I/O devices 37 may be substantially similar to various components disclosed herein and/or may be components of a flight control system and/or other electronic systems of rotorcraft 10.

In some aspects, flight control computer 30 is preprogrammed with certain parameters regarding the CG of rotorcraft 10 such that flight control computer can calculate the CG of rotorcraft 10. For example, flight control computer 30 knows an approximate location of the CG of rotorcraft 10 when rotorcraft 10 is empty (e.g., no pilot, no cargo, no passengers, etc.). A user can input additional load parameters into flight control computer 30 using I/O devices 37. For example, load parameters can include one or more of fuel parameters, passenger parameters, cargo parameters, and ballast parameters. Fuel parameters can include the location of the fuel within the aircraft and the fuel’s weight. Passenger parameters can include the location of the passenger within the aircraft and the passenger’s weight. Cargo parameters can include the location of the cargo within the aircraft and the cargo’s weight. Ballast parameters can include the location of the ballast and the ballast’s weight.

FIG. 8 is an illustrative method 300 for setting a center of gravity of an aircraft. FIG. 8 is discussed relative to FIGS. 1-7. Method 300 begins at step 302. In step 302, load parameters are input into flight control computer 30. For example, a user (e.g., ground crew, pilot, co-pilot, etc.) inputs one or more of fuel parameters, passenger parameters, cargo parameters, and ballast parameters into flight control computer 30. In some aspects, each parameter that is entered describes a weight and a location of the weight within rotorcraft 10. The location of the weight can be described using coordinates (e.g., x, y, z) that are used by flight control computer 30 to calculate the CG of rotorcraft 10. The various parameters may be input using I/O devices 37. After load parameters are entered into flight control computer 30, method 300 proceeds to step 304.

In step 304, flight control computer 30 calculates the CG of rotorcraft 10, factoring in the load parameters entered in step 302. In step 306, the calculated CG is compared to the CG envelope of rotorcraft 10. Responsive to a determination that the calculated CG is outside of the CG envelope of rotorcraft 10, method 300 proceeds to step 308. Responsive to a determination that the calculated CG is within the CG envelope, method 300 proceeds to step 310.

In step 308, one or more movable ballasts 107-109 are relocated to fore/aft ballast docks 26, 28 to move the CG of rotorcraft 10. For example, if the calculated CG indicates a rearward CG, one or more movable ballasts 107-109 are moved to fore ballast dock 26. The farther rearward the CG is, the more weight from movable ballasts 107-109 will need to be moved. If the calculated CG indicates a forward CG, one or more movable ballasts 107-109 are moved to aft ballast dock 28. The farther forward the CG is, the more weight that needs to be moved via movable ballasts 107-109.

If, in step 306, a determination is made that the calculated CG is within the CG envelope, movable ballasts 107-109 do not need to be moved. However, in some aspects, the calculated CG may be within the CG envelope, but may be near a periphery of the CG envelope. In such a situation, despite the calculated CG being within the CG envelope, method 300 may optionally proceed to step 308 to move one or more of movable ballasts 107-109 to shift the CG of rotorcraft 10 to a more favorable position within the CG envelope that is not as close to the periphery of the CG envelope. This may be beneficial where, for example, the CG of rotorcraft 10 may change during flight as fuel burns off. Moving the CG of rotorcraft 10 to be more favorably placed within the CG envelope reduces a likelihood that the CG will transition out of the CG envelope during a flight.

After any changes to the positioning of movable ballasts have been made, method 300 proceeds to step 310 and rotorcraft 10 may begin its flight. In some aspects, method 300 is iterated. For example, method 300 may return to step 304 after completing step 308 to confirm that the relocation of one or more of movable ballasts 107-109 has improved the location of the CG a sufficient amount.

The term “substantially” is defined as largely but not necessarily wholly what is specified (and includes what is specified; e.g., substantially 90 degrees includes 90 degrees and substantially parallel includes parallel), as understood by a person of ordinary skill in the art. In any disclosed embodiment, the terms “substantially,” “approximately,” “generally,” and “about” may be substituted with “within [a percentage] of” what is specified, as understood by a person of ordinary skill in the art. For example, within 1%, 2%, 3%, 5%, and 10% of what is specified herein.

The foregoing outlines features of several embodiments so that those skilled in the art may better understand the aspects of the disclosure. Those skilled in the art should appreciate that they may readily use the disclosure as a basis for designing or modifying other processes and structures for carrying out the same purposes and/or achieving the same advantages of the embodiments introduced herein. Those skilled in the art should also realize that such equivalent constructions do not depart from the spirit and scope of the disclosure, and that they may make various changes, substitutions and alterations herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the disclosure. The scope of the invention should be determined only by the language of the claims that follow. The term “comprising” within the claims is intended to mean “including at least” such that the recited listing of elements in a claim are an open group. The terms “a,” “an” and other singular terms are intended to include the plural forms thereof unless specifically excluded.

What is claimed is:

1. A ballast dock comprising:
 - a housing;
 - a first ballast tray secured within the housing and comprising at least one channel; and
 - at least one movable ballast comprising a side configured to fit within at least one of the at least one channel.

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2. The ballast dock of claim 1, comprising:
 a second ballast tray secured within the housing and
 comprising at least one channel; and
 wherein opposing channels of the first ballast tray and the
 second ballast tray form bays configured to receive a
 movable ballast of the at least one movable ballast.
3. The ballast dock of claim 1, wherein the first ballast tray
 is made of a material selected from the group consisting of
 rubbers, plastics, and polymers.
4. The ballast dock of claim 1, wherein the first ballast tray
 is coated with a material selected from the group consisting
 of rubbers, plastics, and polymers.
5. The ballast dock of claim 1, wherein each channel of
 the at least one channel comprises a different width and
 depth so that only one movable ballast of the at least one
 movable ballast fits within a particular channel of the at least
 one channel.
6. The ballast dock of claim 1, comprising a mounting
 plate configured to secure the ballast dock to an aircraft.
7. The ballast dock of claim 1, comprising:
 a pin; and
 wherein each of the housing and the at least one movable
 ballast include a bore through which the pin extends.
8. The ballast dock of claim 1, wherein the housing
 comprises a cut out configured to expose a portion of the at
 least one movable ballast when the at least one movable
 ballast is inserted into the ballast dock.
9. The ballast dock of claim 1, wherein the at least one
 movable ballast comprises a first, second, and third ballast.
10. The ballast dock of claim 9, wherein the first ballast
 and the second ballast have a first weight and the third
 ballast has a second weight.
11. The ballast dock of claim 1, wherein each movable
 ballast of the at least one movable ballast has a different
 weight.
12. A movable ballast system for an aircraft, the movable
 ballast system comprising:
 a first ballast dock secured to the aircraft and comprising
 a first housing and a first ballast tray secured within the
 first housing, the first ballast tray comprising at least
 one channel;
 a second ballast dock secured to the aircraft and compris-
 ing a second housing and a second ballast tray secured
 within the second housing, the second ballast tray
 comprising at least one channel; and
 at least one movable ballast configured to fit within at
 least one of:
 the at least one channel of the first ballast tray; and
 the at least one channel of the second ballast tray.

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13. The movable ballast system of claim 12, wherein:
 the first ballast dock comprises a third ballast tray secured
 within the first housing and comprising at least one
 channel;
 the second ballast dock comprises a fourth ballast tray
 secured within the second housing and comprising at
 least one channel; and
 opposing channels of the first and third ballast trays and
 opposing channels from the second ballast tray and the
 fourth ballast tray form bays configured to receive a
 movable ballast of the at least one movable ballast.
14. The movable ballast system of claim 12, wherein the
 first ballast tray and the second ballast tray are made of a
 material selected from the group consisting of rubbers,
 plastics, and polymers.
15. The movable ballast system of claim 12, wherein the
 first ballast tray and the second ballast tray are coated with
 a material selected from the group consisting of rubbers,
 plastics, and polymers.
16. The movable ballast system of claim 12, wherein each
 channel of the at least one channel of the first ballast tray and
 the second ballast tray comprises a different width and depth
 so that only one movable ballast of the at least one movable
 ballast fits within a particular channel of the at least one
 channel.
17. The movable ballast system of claim 12, wherein the
 first ballast dock comprises a mounting plate configured to
 secure the first ballast dock to the aircraft.
18. The movable ballast system of claim 12, wherein:
 the first ballast dock comprises a first pin and the second
 ballast dock comprises a second pin;
 the first housing and the at least one movable ballast
 comprise bores configured be coaxially aligned when
 the at least one movable ballast is inserted into the first
 housing and the second housing and the at least one
 movable ballast comprise bores configured to be coaxi-
 ally aligned when the at least one movable ballast is
 inserted into the second housing; and
 the first pin is configured to extend through the bore of the
 first housing and the second pin is configured to extend
 through the bore of the second housing.
19. The movable ballast system of claim 12, wherein each
 of the first housing and the second housing comprise a cut
 out configured to expose a portion of the at least one
 movable ballast when the at least one movable ballast is
 inserted into a ballast dock.
20. The movable ballast system of claim 12, wherein each
 movable ballast of the at least one movable ballast has a
 unique weight.

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